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ABSTRACT

Reality-based television programs showcase actual footage or recreate actual events, and include programs such as "America's Most Wanted" and "Rescue 911." To identify the features that typify reality-based television programs, this study conducted an analysis of formal features used in reality-based programs. Formal features are defined as specific production techniques that are independent of content, message, or story. These features include cuts, dissolves, fades, zooms, voice characterizations, sound effects, and music. Samples of programming broadcast by the ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox networks were collected for analysis. Programs were classified into six categories: (1) humorous reality; (2) serious reality; (3) serious re-enactment; (4) humorous fictional, or situation comedies; (5) serious fictional, or dramas; and (6) factual, or primetime news. Based on Nielsen ratings for March and May of 1992, the three top rated programs from each of the six categories were selected, and one example of each program was videotaped. Two 5-minute segments from each program were selected for coding, and trained coders analyzed formal features of these segments. Analysis revealed that serious re-enactment and serious reality programs were similar to primetime news programs in terms of their formal features, and trained coders had difficulty in accurately distinguishing these two categories of reality-based programs from news programs. (MM)

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An analysis of the formal features of "reality-based" television programs

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Abstract

"Reality-based" television programs, e.g. Rescue 911, America's Funniest Home Videos, are very popular with young viewers. These programs constitute a challenge for research on children's perceived reality of television because they blur traditional distinctions of what is real and what is fictional. An analysis of formal features used in reality-based programs was undertaken in an effort to outline which formal features typify reality-based programs and how they are to be distinguished from more traditional types of programs. Re-enactment and serious reality-based programs were similar to primetime news programs in terms of their formal features and that trained coders had difficulty in accurately distinguishing these reality programs from news. Areas of future research on reality-based programs are discussed.

Keywords: television, formal features, reality-based programming

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An analysis of the formal features of "reality-based" television programs

Perceived Reality of Television

The fiction-reality distinction has long been considered important in effects of television. A semiotic analysis of children's comprehension of cartoons has shown the fiction-reality distinction to be central to children's understanding of televised messages (Hodge & Tripp, 1986). Particularly important have been questions about whether or not television violence and antisocial content has deleterious effects on children once they understand that television is not a "magic window" to reality but rather is made up of scripted and acted performances. Media literacy programs have often emphasized the fictional nature of television in order to lessen the impact of television on children (Corder-Bolz, 1982; Desmond, Singer, Singer, Calam, & Colimore, 1985; Singer, Zuckerman, & Singer, 1980).

During the preschool years children develop a general understanding of the difference between appearance and reality with common objects (Flavell, 1986). Similarly, between ages 2 to 5 years children begin to develop an understanding that television is, for the most part, fictional. By age 5 years, children's judgments about whether something is "real" or not depends on its actual factuality. For example, human actors (regardless of rôle) are identified as "real," whereas cartoon characters are identified as "fantasy" (Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Jaglom & Gardener, 1981). As children move into middle childhood, the question of what is real on television becomes multidimensional. By 7 or 8 years, children begin to focus more on the distinction between "realistic" and "unrealistic" rather than the basic distinction between fact and

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fiction (Dorr, 1983; Hawkins, 1977). Between the ages of 7 to 12 years children shift from using possibility as their reality criterion to probability (Dorr, 1983; Morison, Kelly, & Gardner, 1981).

There is a large literature and debate over whether violence depicted on television affects children. Perceived realism of television content may play a mediating role between exposure to television content and its effects. Many studies have shown that content perceived to be unreal or unrealistic has less influence on viewer behavior than content judged to be realistic (Feshbach, 1972; Greenberg, 1972; Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice & Fischer, 1983; Noble, 1975; Reeves, 1978). Children aged 9 to 11 years were found to be more aggressive after viewing a film segment about a college riot when it was labeled "real" than when the same segment was labeled "fiction" (Feshbach, 1972). Other experimental investigations using children have shown that factual or real television segments have more pronounced effects on behavior than fictional television, especially in terms of the imitation of violence (Atkin, 1983; Sawin, 1981; Snow, 1974). Further perceived social realism has been found to be correlated with arousal measures. Geen (1975) found that subjects showed greater arousal measured by the GSR response to a film labeled "real" compared to the same film labeled "fiction." Ross & Condry (1985) found that adult males who saw a program about sexual abuse were more emotionally upset by the film when it was described as real than when it was described as fictional.

Formal features, genre, and perceived reality

The formal features of television are those auditory and visual features that result from specific production techniques independent from the content, the message, or story to be conveyed. Formal features include cuts, dissolves, fades, zooms, and other special visual effect as well as voice characterizations, sound effects, and music.

Research focused on how children decide whether a television segment may be judged as fact or fiction suggests that children use formal production features as well as content cues to decide what genre of television program they are watching and then use their knowledge of genre to decide whether the program is real or fictional (Huston & Wright, 1983). For example, documentary and news programs, which contain factual content, typically have a narrator who provides voice-over commentary during visual segments. Fictional programs, on the other hand, typically have voice characterizations, sound effects, dramatic music, and, in comedies, a laugh track. In one investigation, 5- and 7-year-old children were able to distinguish news, documentary, and fictional drama segments which were matched for content, but differed in form (Wright, Huston, Reitz, & Piemyat, 1992; Leary, Wright, & Huston, 1985). In an interview study after the "Challenger" shuttle disaster, 9- to 12-year-olds named form cues as the basis for knowing the television broadcast was real. Children mentioned such features as the television station logo, the unsteadiness of the camera, wide shots rather than closeups of the participants, the absence of music, and disfluent speech from the announcer (Wright, Kunkel, Piñon, & Huston, 1989).

Reality-Based Television

Beginning in the late 1980's there has been a surge in the number and popularity of television programs that showcase "actual" footage or "re-create" actual events. These programs have been referred to as reality-based programs. Popular examples include America's Most Wanted and Rescue 911. Reality-based programs involve the re-enactment of "real-life" events and/or the selective use of "real" footage. Typical content domains include crime, the police, and the emergency services.

Although shows claiming to be dramatizations of "true" events (e.g. Dragnet) have formed a part of television programming since its early days, a trend toward more realistic program formats began in the late 1970's. One of the first exemplars of the reality-based format was Real People which aired between 1979 and 1984. Real People featured interviews and footage of real people with unusual occupations and hobbies. This was followed by spin-off shows such as That's Incredible, which featured such oddities as a dog who catches sharks and a daredevil who catches bullets with his teeth (Brooks & Marsh, 1981).

The present trend of reality-based programming can be traced to 10 April 1988 with the primetime premiere of America's Most Wanted on the newly founded FOX network. With the success of America's Most Wanted, FOX in particular began vigorously to expand reality-based programming. Perhaps this was due to the low production costs of reality-based programming which would be attractive to the fledgling network (Thomas & Litman, 1991). In addition to reality-based programs whose central content involves crime stories, the police, and the emergency services, at this time

several "home videos" programs began to appear, such as America's Funniest Home Videos. A complete listing of reality-based programs broadcast on the four networks in May 1992 is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Reality-based programs usually are aired in the early evening primetime hours between 8 and 9 o'clock (eastern and pacific time, 7 and 8 o'clock central and mountain time), indicating that they are aimed at younger primetime viewers. In fact, CBS actively markets Rescue 911 to young viewers by advertising it on Saturday morning television. Nationally, Rescue 911 is CBS' second most popular show with young viewers (aged two to eleven years). In this respect it enjoys a larger child audience that either Garfield and Friends or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Antilla, 1992). Empirical evidence collected in the spring of 1991 (Huston, Wright, Fitch, Wroblewski, & Piemyat; 1992) indicates that reality based programs are very popular with young viewers. As a part of a larger study, 82 second grade and 62 fifth grade children were asked which programs they watched regularly out of a list of 51. Of the 5 reality-based programs included in the list, 3 were among the 10 most popular. America's Funniest Home Videos was the most popular, with 88.9% of subjects indicating that they watched this program regularly. Rescue 911 was ranked sixth with 73.6% and Unsolved Mysteries was ranked eighth with 66.0%.

Purpose

Despite their popularity and ubiquity, reality-based programs have received little attention in scientific research. Although there are a number of interesting questions one could pose about reality-based programs, a point of immediate interest is the way in which reality-based programs make use of the forms of television. A distinctive feature of reality-based programs is the way in which traditional expectations for what kinds of television forms are paired with which kinds of content are violated; factual content is often paired with features traditionally associated with fictional content or vice versa. For example in a reality-based program which features "real footage", dramatic background music might be laid over actual footage of a police chase scene. Or in a re-enactment program, a handheld camera might be used to provide an on-the-scene camera "look" in a segment which was entirely scripted, acted, and produced by professionals. Although much television research has focused on the content of television, what is of particular interest here is the manipulation of the forms of television in programs which are similar in content area -- crime, police, emergency situations or humor.

In addition to being of interest in their own right, analyses of reality-based programs may have thought-provoking consequences for other research domains. Reality-based programs constitute a challenge for perceived reality research because they blur traditional distinctions of what is real and what is fictional. Research has shown that children use both content and feature cues to determine genre, which they in turn use to determine factuality and realism. What kind of effect do the mixed signals of reality-based programs have on genre determination and, subsequently, perceived reality? If the chain from features to genre to perceived reality is indeed correct (Huston & Wright,

1983), then we need to determine which features are associated with reality-based programs and whether or not these constitute a consistent genre or family of subgenres distinct from traditional fictional and factual programming. In order to do this it is necessary to first outline the particular production features which typify reality-based programming as a genre. Such an analysis would constitute an important preparatory step before addressing the question of what effect reality-based programs have on viewers.

The purpose of the analysis reported here was to outline a taxonomy of the formal features employed in reality-based programs. In particular, we predicted that (1) we would discover a set of production features which typified reality-based programs in general, (2) reality-based programs would be significantly different from their traditional counterparts in terms of their production features, and (3) reality-based programs would be more like factual than fictional program formats in terms of their production features.

Method

The Sample

Samples of programming broadcast by the four networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX) were collected. In order for a program to be deemed a "reality-based program" it had to meet the following criteria: (1) The program contains real footage or re-enacted elements; however it is not explicitly news (e.g. CBS Nightly News). (2) The program is not a product of the network's news production department (e.g. 48 Hours); the primary intent is to entertain rather than to inform. (3) The program employs a disclaimer or explicit statement to acknowledge that it contains real footage or re-enacted

elements during the opening or closing titles. (4) The program has a specific content theme which the series is organized around (crime, rescues, etc.). (5) The program is a regularly scheduled program of 60 minutes or less; that is, not a movie or special. Twelve programs fit these criteria in May 1992 (listed in Table 1).

Reality-based programs were initially categorized according to two criteria: global format and perceived intent. Programs were considered to be "re-enactment programs" if all or most of the material was re-enacted. Programs were considered to be "real footage programs" if all or most of the material was composed of live footage obtained from "on the scene" cameras. Programs were categorized as humorous, as opposed to serious, if they contained a laugh track or if jokes and other attempts at humor occurred frequently. Although four possible program categories are generated by these classifications -- humorous reality, serious reality, humorous re-enactment and serious re-enactment -- there were no humorous re-enactment programs in May 1992. In addition to these three test categories, programs were collected in each of three control categories: humorous fictional (situation comedy), serious fictional (drama), and factual (primetime news).

Based on the average weekly Nielsen ratings for March and May 1992, the top three rated programs from each of the six categories were selected (listed in Table 2). One example of each program was video taped. Two 5-minute clips from each program were selected for coding. One clip was sampled from the beginning of the program and one from the end of the program -- a total of 36 segments.

Insert Table 2 about here

Coding Procedure

Segments from each of the six categories were presented in a random order to three trained coders who coded all tapes independently. Coders recorded the presence of formal features by noting the time at which they were observed in each segment. After they completed coding formal features, the coders indicated which of the six categories they thought the segment exemplified. Formal features coding categories included the following visual and auditory features. All features were coded for presence or absence only.

STUDIO CAMERA. Picture quality is very clear, shots are conventional

ON SCENE CAMERA. This includes both "on the scene" cameras and those shot with non-professional equipment by amateur camera operators.

PROFESSIONAL ACTORS. Persons on the screen are professional actors clearly portraying a rôle.

PARTICIPANT ACTORS. Persons on the screen are not actors by trade but are portraying themselves in a re-creation of events which happened to them.

NO ACTORS. Persons on the screen are not "acting" The events are actually happening.

HOST/PRESENTER. Someone whose rôle is to introduce a show or segment.

SETS. Any non-naturally occurring indoor or outdoor setting. This includes "News Desks."

INTERVIEWS. Any interview setting.

TITLING. Anything deliberately (in post production) put up on the screen for the viewer to read. Examples include place names, times, person names.

STILLS/PHOTOS/GRAPHICS. Any post production static visuals.

SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS. These include wipes, slow motion, slow dissolves.

REAL FOOTAGE. Footage which is not scripted or dramatized. Not an arranged studio interview. This may apply to the whole segment or part.

RE-ENACTMENT. Footage which is a scripted and acted dramatization of an event which actually occurred.

STUDIO QUALITY SOUND. Clear, clean sound. No natural sounds or static.

ROUGH SOUND. Rough, unclear or otherwise "unprofessional" sound. May contain static or natural sounds (birds, cars, crowd sounds).

SCRIPTED SPEECH. Speech which is contrived for the purpose of the segment.

AD-LIB SPEECH. Non-scripted speech.

VOICE OVER NARRATION. Narrative speech heard over footage, spoken by an unseen narrator.

FOREGROUND MUSIC. Music heard on its own when there is no dialogue. This includes music played during scene changes.

BACKGROUND MUSIC. Music which can be heard in the background, "behind" dialogue.

APPLAUSE. May be from a visible studio audience or added track.

LAUGH TRACK. May be from a visible studio audience or added track.

SOUND EFFECTS. Sounds added in post production. Includes ringing phones, funny noises, sirens.

Coder Reliability

Overall the three coders agreed 87% of the time on feature coding, Cohen's Kappa = .86. By program category, as determined by the experimenter, they agreed 96% of the time about features in serious fictional segments, 90% of the time about features in humorous fictional segments, 88% of the time about features in humorous reality segments, 85% of the time about features in factual segments, 84% of the time about features in serious reality segments, and 80% of the time about features in re-enactment segments. Again, disagreements were greatest in factual, serious reality, and re-enactment segments.

The three coders agreed only 69% of the time about which category of program segment they were watching, Cohen's Kappa = .63. However disagreement was confined to two program categories in particular: re-enactment and serious reality. For all other program categories coders agreed 100% of the time. Coders agreed only 17% of the time (the level of chance) that a segment should be categorized as "re-enactment." When there as a disagreement, one or more coders had categorized the segment as either factual or serious reality. For serious reality segments there was no agreement at all, but this was found to be due to one coder who categorized all serious reality segments as factual segments. If data from this one coder is removed, agreement for serious reality segments for the remaining two coders is 100%. However low levels of agreement remain for re-enactment segments (33%).

Results

Within-Group Comparison of Reality Programs

The hypothesis that we would discover a set of production features which typified reality-based programs in general was not confirmed. In order to test whether the reality programs were similar in general we calculated correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) comparing each of the reality-based program types with one another. The 3 types of reality-based program were not significantly correlated with each other. Correlation coefficients are listed in Table 3. In order to test whether the reality programs shared similarities in terms of individual production features, we conducted ANOVAs comparing the distribution of each of the 23 features in the 3 reality program types. Production feature frequency counts were the dependent measure. Significant

differences ($p < .01$) were found for 21 features, the only exceptions being on scene camera $F(2,6)=6.063$, $p=.036$ and narration $F(2,6)=1.500$, $p=.296$.

Insert Table 3 about here

Comparison of Reality Programs with their Traditional Counterparts

The hypothesis that reality-based programs are significantly different from their traditional counterparts was partially supported. In order to test whether the reality programs were similar in general to their traditional counterparts we calculated correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) comparing each of the reality-based program types with its traditional counterpart. Correlation coefficients are listed in Table 3. Humorous reality programs and re-enactment programs were found to be significantly different from their traditional counterparts. Humorous reality programs and humorous programs (sitcoms) were not significantly correlated, $r = .4724$, p = ns, nor were re-enactment programs and serious traditional programs (drama), $r = .3211$, p = ns. However serious reality programs were significantly correlated with their traditional counterpart, news programs, $r = .5616$, $p < .01$. Further we unexpectedly found re-enactment programs to be significantly correlated with news programs, $r = .6070$, $p < .01$.

In order to discover where, in terms of production features, programs types were different, we conducted two-tailed t-tests comparing serious reality segments with news segments and also re-enactment segments with news segments. Formal features

frequency counts were the dependent measure. Results are presented in Figures 1 and 2. For the comparison of serious reality segments with news segments, significant differences ($p < .01$) were found for only 6 features. These were studio camera ($t = -11.00$, $p < .000$), host ($t = -5.50$, $p < .005$), sets ($t = -5.29$, $p < .006$), graphics ($t = -10.61$, $p < .000$), studio sound ($t = -5.50$, $p < .005$), and background music ($t = -11.00$, $p < .000$). Four features -- professional actors, participant actors, applause, and laugh track -- were not found in any segments. Non-significant differences were found for the remaining 12 features. For the comparison of re-enactment segments with news segments, significant differences ($p < .01$) were found for only 4 features. These involved the use of actors and re-enactments: professional actors ($t = 11.00$, $p < .000$), participant actors ($t = 5.00$, $p < .007$), no actors ($t = -5.20$, $p < .007$), and re-enactment ($t = 17.00$, $p < .000$). Two features -- applause and laugh track -- were not found in any segments. Non-significant differences were found for the remaining 17 features.

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

Comparison of Reality Programs with Fictional and Factual Program Types

The hypothesis that reality programs are more similar to factual programs than fictional programs was supported for reality serious and re-enactment programs. Total presence/absences scores for each feature in each category were submitted to a cluster

analysis. The purpose of the cluster analysis was to see how similar program types were in terms of frequency of production features. Programs most alike in terms of their feature presence/absence scores will combine on the each pass of the cluster analysis. This gives us a hint about "natural classes" of programs types. Results are presented in Table 4. The first categories to be combined were the 2 of the "traditional" television program types, humorous fiction (sitcoms) and serious fiction (drama). This, not surprisingly, indicates a similar "cocktail" of production features used in these two traditional program types. Hereafter we will refer to the humorous and serious fiction grouping as the "fictional cluster."

Insert Table 4 about here

On the second pass, re-enactment and factual programs combine. This shows re-enactment programs to be more similar to factual programs than either fictional programs or the 2 other reality-based program types. This is interesting in that re-enactment programs are what their name suggests -- scripted and acted dramatizations of events which took place in the past. Therefore, re-enactment programs are, in at least some sense, fictional, however in terms of their features they are more like factual programs than fictional programs.

On the third pass, the serious reality category joined the group containing re-enactment programs and factual programs to create what we refer to hereafter as the

"reality cluster." Again we found that re-enactment and serious reality programs were more similar to factual than fictional programs. This is interesting in that this grouping was similar to the pattern of categorization "errors" made by the coders. There was little agreement on category for these 3 types of program. Further, we again found that humorous reality programs were a separate thing to other reality-based programs. They do not join the reality cluster until the fourth (and penultimate) pass.

The grouping obtained on the third pass -- the reality cluster, the fictional cluster and the humorous reality group -- was particularly interesting in that it suggested a reality genre containing serious reality, re-enactment, and factual programs. In order to test whether this cluster was indeed different from the fictional cluster and humorous reality group, we conducted one-way ANOVAs comparing each of three clusters obtained on the third pass of the cluster analysis for each of the 23 features. Formal features frequency counts were the dependent measure. Results are presented in Figure 3. Significant differences ($p < .01$) were found for 16 features. These were on scene camera, professional actors, no actors, host, sets, interviews, titling, graphics, visual effects, real footage, rough sound, scripts, ad lib speech, narration, applause, laugh track and sound effects. These differences reflect a basic difference in quality of production and quantity of post production between the three groups. For the fictional cluster there were high means for features associated with high production quality in sound and talent (e.g. professional actors) and low means for features associated with low production quality (e.g. on scene camera, rough sound). Also there were low means for many post production features (e.g. titling, narration). For the reality-based cluster more or less the opposite was true. There were high means for features

associated with lower production quality in sound, visuals, and talent (with the exception of a show "host"); but higher means for many post production features. In a sense the lower production quality is "made up for" by adding visual and sound effects in post production. This difference is exacerbated for humorous reality shows for which there were again high means for features associated with low production quality in sound, visuals, and talent (again, with the exception of a show "host"); but the highest means for many post production features.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Non-significant differences were found for the following features: studio camera, studio sound, sets, foreground music, and background music. Note that these features are so common as to be almost criterial to the production of any television program. Non-significant differences were also found for the features of re-enactment and participant actors, but this was due to the fact that these features occur only in re-enactment shows and the variance within the reality cluster was too low to produce a significant effect.

Discussion

The prediction that we would discover a set of production features which typified reality-based programs in general was not confirmed. Although we expected to find a core group of formal features which defined the genre, we found significant differences

in production feature frequencies for all but two features: on scene camera and narration. This could be due to the fact that reality-based programs are still a "young" genre and that the forms of the genre are not yet conventionalized.

The hypothesis that reality-based programs are significantly different from their traditional counterparts was partially supported. Humorous reality programs and re-enactment programs were found to be significantly different from their traditional counterparts. This finding provides support for considering reality-based programs to be a new television genre, different to traditional fictional drama and situation comedies.

A closer look at the results indicates the essence of the difference to be in terms of the quality of production and the quantity of post production. Reality-based programs, especially humorous ones, seemed to be made up of features indicating low production quality, but were later heavily "doctored" with high effect post production features, as if to make up for the lack of original production quality. This was especially true of "home video" programs which featured segments made by amateurs on home video equipment. These videos were later enhanced and modified using professional post production. This was less often the case on other reality-based programs, however they also feature amateur actors and use lower quality production techniques. The end product is reality-based television, but it is also inexpensive television. This low cost could be partially behind the explosion of reality-based television programming. Another aspect of using both fictional and factual elements is the choice of those features which are highly emotive, thus garnering maximal viewer effect and, one assumes the producers would hope, higher ratings.

The hypothesis that, in terms of their production features, reality-based programs would be more like factual than fictional program formats was confirmed. Serious reality programs were significantly correlated with their traditional counterpart, news programs. Further analysis showed re-enactment programs also to be significantly correlated with news programs.. That these reality-based programs were similar to news programs is likely to be due to imitation on the part of producers. Giving their programs the look and feel of primetime news programs would tend to lend them an air of credibility. The cluster analysis suggested that factual primetime news programs were, in some sense, part of the reality genre. Although imitation was the likely source of the clustering effect, an alternative hypothesis is that perhaps some reverse imitation is in effect, with primetime news programs now beginning to imitate some of the features of reality-based programs.

Because viewers make decisions about the factuality and social realism of television programs based on both content and formal features, this similarity between programs in the reality cluster may indicate that, at least in terms of formal features, viewers may have trouble distinguishing fact from fiction in these types of programs. Indeed, this was the case for the coders, who when confronted with these programs, could not reliably agree on what type of program they were watching.

There are a number of ways in which these results may be challenged. There may have been some bias inherent in this limited sample. Also there might be inherent biases in the limited features chosen for coding and in the choice to code for presence or absence only. Nevertheless, the present study gives us a hint about what reality-based programs look like and what kind of distinctions viewers may or may not be making.

The next logical step in the study of reality-based programs is to discover how viewers perceive the reality in reality-based programs. Because content and features are often at odds in reality-based programs (fictional features with factual content), on what basis and how will viewers make reality judgments.

This question is especially interesting when asked regarding the child viewer. The early time slots given to these programs indicate that young viewers are being targeted by the producers of reality-based programs. Further, there is evidence which suggests that these shows are especially popular with younger viewers. What are children's perceptions of the reality and social realism of reality-based programs? Do these perceptions follow the normal time course for development of the fiction-reality distinction or do reality-based programs constitute special problems for distinguishing the real from the fictional and the realistic from the unrealistic?

Finally, many reality-based programs contain scenes which are graphic or violent, showing both verbal and physical aggression. Both Cops and Code 3 carry warnings about "graphic" content. We ask what effect such programs have on viewers, especially the young viewers with whom these shows are popular. In light of the frequent finding that real or realistic violence has a greater effect on viewers, how will reality-based programs affect arousal and aggression? Furthermore, many reality-based shows deal with crime and the police, either to re-enact the deeds of a wanted criminal or to show "a day in the life" of a police officer. The police are always shown to be in the right and they "always get their man." Research by Van der Voort (1986) has shown that children (third to sixth graders) are more approving of aggression when the aggressors are portrayed as "good guys" than when they are portrayed as "bad guys."

Although these features have always been a component of fictional police dramas, how does the reality element affect young viewers' attitudes and beliefs about the police?

In conclusion, the new television genre of reality-based programming poses a number of issues for studies of the perceived reality of television. For these reasons and others, reality-based programs deserve further attention in television effects research.

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Table 1

Reality-based programming available on four networks in 1992

Program	Day	Time		Network
FBI: The Untold Stories	Mon	8:00	8:30	ABC
American Detective	Mon	8:30	9:00	ABC
Rescue 911	Tue	8:00	9:00	CBS
Unsolved Mysteries	Wed	8:00	9:00	NBC
Top Cops	Thu	8:00	9:00	CBS
America's Most Wanted	Fri	8:00	9:00	FOX
Hidden Video	Fri	9:30	10:00	FOX
Cops	Sat	8:00	8:30	FOX
Cops	Sat	8:30	9:00	FOX
Code 3	Sat	9:00	9:30	FOX
America's Funniest Home Videos	Sun	8:00	8:30	ABC
America's Funniest People	Sun	8:30	9:00	ABC
Candid Camera	M-F	11:30	12:00	CBS

Table 2

Programs Analyzed in Each Program Category

	Dramatic/Serious	Humorous
Re-enactment	Unsolved Mysteries	NA
	Rescue 911	NA
	America's Most Wanted	NA
Reality	American Detective	America's Funniest Videos
	Cops	America's Funniest People
	Code 3	Candid Camera
Fictional	Northern Exposure	Roseanne
	Murder, She Wrote	Murphy Brown
	LA Law	Home Improvements
Factual	60 Minutes	NA
	48 Hours	NA
	20/20	NA

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients (Pearson's r) Comparison of Program Types

	Program Types					
	RH	RS	RE	TH	TS	TN
RH	1.0000					
RS	.0098	1.0000				
RE	-.2448	.2769	1.0000			
TH	.4724	-.5520*	-.0852	1.0000		
TS	.2963	-.3673	.3211	.7985*	1.0000	
TN	.1855	.5616*	.6070*	-.2502	.0499	1.0000

Note:

RH reality humorous

RS reality serious

RE re-enactment

TH traditional humorous (sticoms)

TS traditional serious (drama)

TN factual (primetime news)

* - Signif. < .01 (2-tailed)

Table 4

Schematic presentation of cluster analysis results.

CLUSTER ANALYSIS CYCLE	CATEGORIES					
0	RH	RS	RE	TN	TS	TH
1	RH	RS	RE	TN	TS-TH	
2	RH	RS	RE-TN		TS-TH	
3	RH	RS-RE-TN			TS-TH	
4	RH-RS-RE-TN				TS-TH	
5	RH-RS-RE-TN-TS-TH					

Note:

RH reality humorous

RS reality serious

RE re-enactment

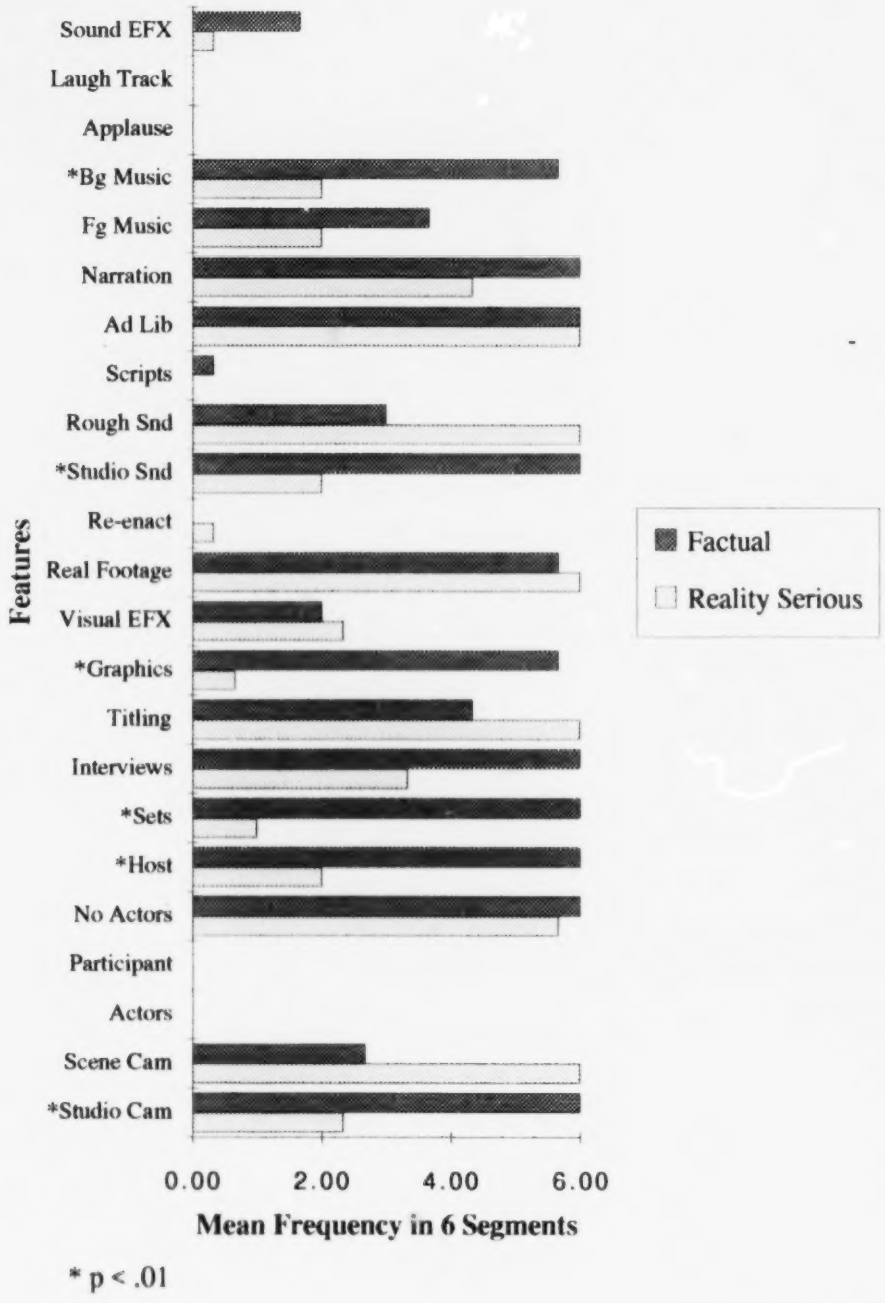
TH traditional humorous (sticoms)

TS traditional serious (drama)

TN factual (primetime news)

Figure 1:

Results of t-test comparing factual (news) with reality serious programs



* $p < .01$

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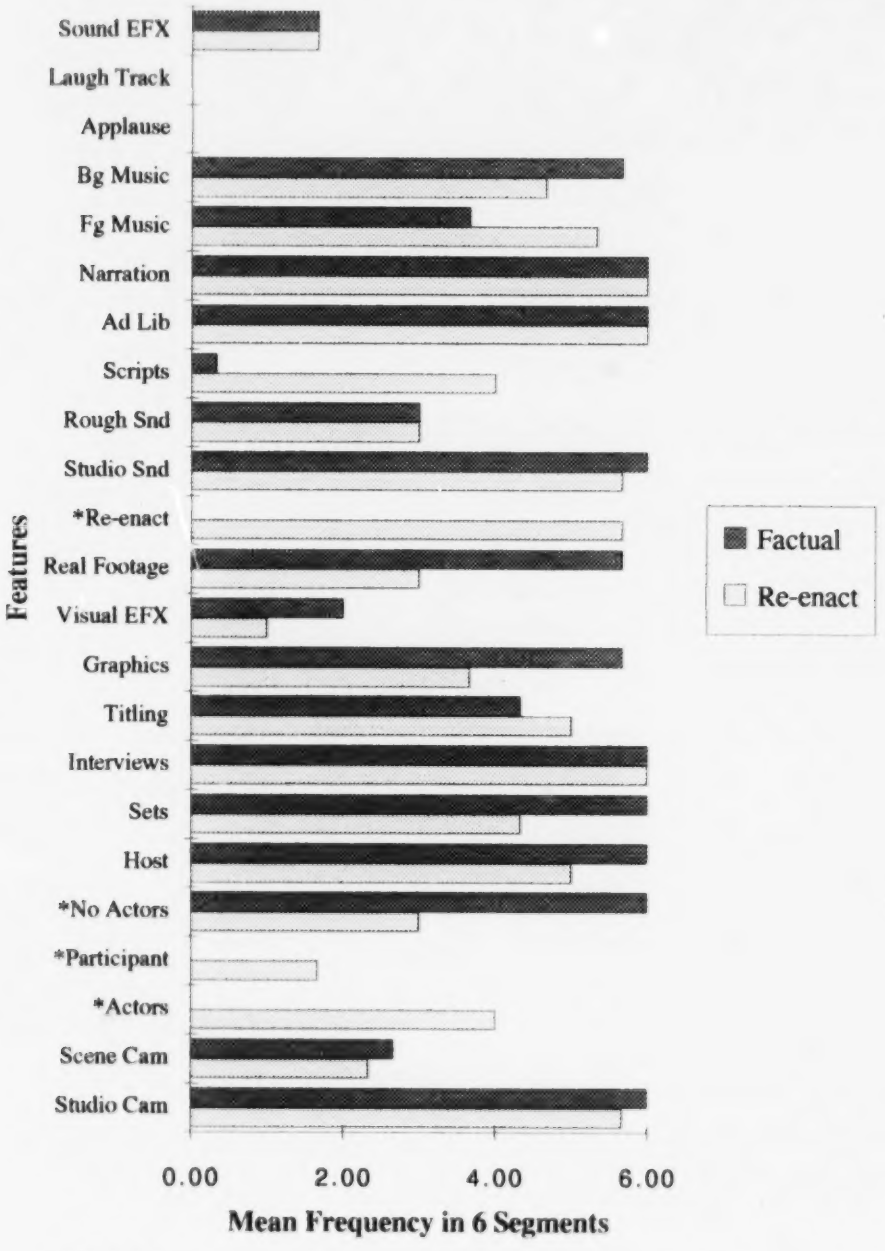
Figure 2:

Results of t-test comparing factual (news) with re-enactment programs



* $p < .01$

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Figure 3:

Results of ANOVA comparing 3 program clusters

* $p < .01$